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From Van Gogh to Lady Gaga:

Artist Eccentricity Increases Perceived Artistic Skill and Art Appreciation

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Abstract

We examined the impact of eccentricity on the evaluation of artistic skills and the quality of artworks. Based on the notion that artists are typically perceived as eccentric, creative and skilled, we tested the hypothesis that eccentricity increases perceptions of artistic quality. In Study 1, Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* painting was evaluated more positively when he was said to have cut off his left ear lobe than when this information was not presented. In Study 2, participants liked art more when the artist was eccentric. In Study 3, the evaluation of fictitious art increased due to the artist's eccentric appearance. Study 4 established that the eccentricity effect was specific to unconventional as opposed to conventional art. In Study 5, Lady Gaga's music was more appreciated when she was displayed as highly eccentric; however, the eccentricity effect emerged only when the display seemed authentic. These novel findings indicate that art evaluations are partly rooted in perceptions of artists' eccentricity and evidence the importance of perceived authenticity and skills for these attributions.

Keywords: Person perception, trait inferences, eccentricity, artists

From Van Gogh to Lady Gaga:

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Art is central tenet of human civilization, be it in the form of Vincent van Gogh's *Sunflowers* painting or Lady Gaga's song *Poker Face*. What role do people's perceptions of the artist play in appreciating the art? Do perceptions of eccentricity of artists influence how people evaluate the skills of the artists and the quality of their work?

Intriguingly, artistic creativity is associated with being less conventional (Feist, 1998) and artists are more likely than others to suffer from distinct psychopathologies (e.g., Akinola & Mendes, 2008; Jamison, 1993). Consistently, unconventionalism among artists is exemplified by artist behaviors such as allegedly cutting off an ear lobe (Van Gogh) or questioning sexual norms with provoking appearances (Lady Gaga). Consistent with this notion, Martindale (1989) concluded that people *stereotypically* view artists as "creative geniuses" and "eccentric and bizarre creatures" (p. 219). That is, the stereotype of artists' eccentricity—being unconventional and slightly strange (Oxford Dictionary, 2011)—is associated with their creative skills

Is there reason to expect a stereotypical cue, such as eccentricity of an artist, to impact on art perceptions? Likely, eccentricity of an artist as a cue confirms stereotypical expectations. We propose that the artist and the artist's work is more likely to be evaluated as creative and skilled if eccentricity is displayed. Further, we propose that this stereotype-based inference is especially likely if the displayed eccentricity seems authentic, thus constituting a reliable cue for such stereotypical inferences.

Eccentricity as elicitor of stereotypical attributions is intriguing for several reasons. First of all, perceptions of eccentricity are common in everyday life. Moreover, and strikingly, we are unaware of any empirical psychological examinations of this construct in relation to social judgment. In addition, the proposed impact of eccentricity cues on creative

art and artist evaluations seems intriguingly ironic. Specifically, eccentricity is a stereotypical feature of artists, thus representing a *common* attribute of stereotypical artists, whereas eccentricity *itself*, rather paradoxically, represents a *deviation* from what is common (e.g., being different from others). The proposed eccentricity effect is in part related to and based on different lines of research about artist evaluation and primed and assessed creativity. We will present these approaches and flesh out their relationship to our own work.

Deviation and Actual Creativity

The hypothesized eccentricity effect critically rests on the assumption that a link exists between eccentricity and quality of the creative work within the stereotype of artists. On a general level, eccentricity is a deviation from the norm, something that is not routinely expected of human behavior. Consistently, research has shown that also creativity is associated with deviations. Gocłowska and Crisp (2013), for example, found that the activation of counter-stereotypical thinking, a deviation from default cognitive processes, propelled the generation of creative ideas, and facilitates flexibility and problem solving (Gocłowska, Crisp, & Labuschagne, 2013). Moreover, research by Maddux, Adam, and Galinsky (2010) evidences that divergent cultural experiences, such as multiculturalism and living abroad, can foster creative performance (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009; Tadmore, Galinsky, & Maddux, 2012), as does the ability of being able to draw on different social identities (Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, & Lee, 2008). Barron (1993) suggests, consistent with these findings, that creativity is rooted in "oddness of thought or feeling, when coupled with an ability to reconsider and reformulate" (p. 183), also labeled as "controlled weirdness." (p. 183).

Experimental examinations of primed deviance, though not in all cases the same as eccentricity[1], indicates that deviance increases creative engagement (Förster, Friedman, Butterback, & Sassenberg, 2005). Specifically, contemplating the stereotypically deviant 'punk' character versus 'engineer' (see also Dijksterhuis & Van Knippenberg, 1998) led to enhanced performance on subsequent creative tasks. Similarly, the exposure to a poster that contained a deviant symbol (vs. a consistent arrangement of symbols) enhanced creative idea generation.

Different from our research, the above studies were concerned with induced creative behavior rather than *evaluations* of creative work, and this distinction is essential: These prior findings illuminate the intimate bond between divergent cognitive processes (e.g., generation of counter-stereotypes, processing deviant information) and creativity. This association may form a factual basis upon which the proposed stereotype based eccentricity effect rests. That is, this strong association between divergence and creativity possibly contributes to the overgeneralized expectation that creativity sprouts from eccentric artists' work. Different form the work above, we examine how evaluation of *others'* work is based on the belief that eccentricity is related to creativity.

Contextual Dependency of Valuing Creative Art

Research that examined *perceived* rather than expressed creativity attests to the impact of situational factors on evaluations of others' creative work. For example, Schimmel and Förster (2008) found that a high temporal distance prime enhanced the acceptance of

[1] It is important to highlight that eccentricity, in this sense, should not be equated with the more general concept of deviance, although they clearly share features. To illustrate, a day in the UK or Ireland warmer than 30°C certainly deviates from common expectations, but it could hardly be called an 'eccentric' day. Eccentricity seems to involve a more specific case of deviance, applied to a subject's (e.g., artist) expression.

unconventional art, likely due to inclusive categorization eminent to high level construals that people formed of these targets under conditions of psychological distance (e.g., Liberman & Trope, 1998). Moreover, research by Adarves-Yorno, Postmes, and Haslam (2006; 2008) evidences that evaluations of creativity are in part shaped by ingroup norms to which the creative expressions need to conform. Thus, people's evaluations of the creative work of *others* are partly shaped by situational factors, reflecting that perceptions of creativity are indeed malleable by factors unrelated to the creative process. Building on this line of research, we pose that creativity evaluations are in part formed by impression of artist stereotypicality, and eccentricity in particular. Going beyond this prior work, we argue that eccentricity of artists affects the evaluation of these artists' skills and the quality of their work. Note that the process we propose is stereotype confirmation rather than construal levels or social identification.

Stereotype Confirmation About Artists

We argue that based on the association between eccentricity and creative work as part of the stereotype of artists, displaying eccentricity increases perceived skills of the artist and the quality of their work. The process best resembles one of stereotype confirmation (e.g., Snyder & Swann, 1978). That is, if artists display eccentricity, perceivers assume that the artist is skilled and thus produces creative work. However, this stereotype-based inference emerges only if either the cue is diagnostic (vs. non-diagnostic) and applicable (vs. non-applicable).

Prior research attests to the importance of stereotype confirmation in the evaluation of others, including artists. In one study, for example, Phelan and Rudman (2010) observed that rap songs were more appreciated when people believed the artist to be Black in comparison to White. That is, when the exemplar artist was consistent with stereotypical expectations regarding the art (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), then this relatively high consistency between

exemplar and stereotype led to more positive evaluations of the art compared to when the stereotype was not confirmed. These results suggest, at least conceptually, that the confirmation of specific artist stereotypes positively impact on evaluations of their work. In extension of these previous findings, we also examined critical boundary conditions not examined in this previous research, including the moderating impact of applicability to artistic work (conventional vs. unconventional) and the defining moderating role of perceived diagnosticity of eccentricity. Moreover, we examined the mediating role of perceived skills on the evaluation of art crafted by eccentric artists. Hence, we probed why confirmation of the stereotype based on personal features increases evaluations. In addition to identifying a mediating process, we pose that perceived authenticity is a key *moderator* of the eccentricity effect.

After a pilot study confirmed our 'a priori' assumption that eccentricity is indeed associated with typical artists[2], we conducted experimental studies that tested the effects of eccentricity on the evaluation of artists' skills and their art, using a variety of eccentricity manipulations and artists, from Vincent van Gogh's eccentric behavior in Study 1 to Lady Gaga's appearance in Study 5. Specifically, in Studies 1 and 2 we established the eccentricity effect across different eccentricity cues and targets. Next, in Studies 3-5, we probed the mediating role of perceived artist skill and boundary conditions of the proposed effect.

[2] Twenty-two undergraduate students indicated scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) whether a variety of characteristics were part of the stereotype of artists, including *rebel*, *arrogant*, *eccentric*, *unkempt*, *depressed*, *outgoing*, and *loner*. Indeed, average eccentricity ratings were on the higher end of the scale (M = 6.32, SD = 1.00). Interestingly, eccentricity was also significantly more stereotypical compared to each of the other characteristics (all ps < .01).

Study 1: Van Gogh's Ear Lobe

First, we tested whether an artist's eccentric behavior increases evaluations of the artist's art. Specifically, participants evaluated Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* after some were exposed to his rather eccentric alleged behavior of cutting off his ear lobe.

Method

Thirty-eight students (8 men, 30 women; M_{age} = 24.08, *SD* = 7.63) from a Western European university volunteered to participate in a short computer study. They were randomly assigned to the eccentricity or control condition of a between-participants design. After providing informed consent and reporting demographic information, we informed participants in the eccentricity condition that Van Gogh was believed to have cut off his own left ear lobe, whereas in the control condition we did not confront participants with this information. Next, we presented a color picture of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* and asked participants evaluate the painting on two items. Specifically, they were requested to indicate whether they liked that and whether it looked attractive, both on scaled from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

Results and Discussion

Participants' ratings of the two items were averaged to form our art evaluation dependent variable (α = .80). This dependent variable was then entered into a one-way ANOVA with the eccentricity prime as independent variable. As predicted, the art was evaluated more positively when Van Gogh's eccentric behavior was mentioned (*M* = 5.43, *SD* = 1.38) than when it was not mentioned (*M* = 4.53, *SD* = 1.05), $F(1, 36) = 4.89$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .12$. That is, considering the artist's eccentricity increased the appreciation for his art.

Study 2: Jón Stefánsson's Odd Personality

In Study 2 we sought to demonstrate the eccentricity effect for unknown art and artists, by manipulating eccentric personality, and by having participants assign a monetary value to the artwork.

Method

Thirty-three students (12 men, 21 women; M_{age} = 19.19, *SD* = 5.66) from a Western European university participated in exchange for candy. Participants were randomly assigned to the eccentric or control condition. After providing informed consent and reporting demographic information, participants evaluated three artworks allegedly created by the (factually nonexistent) Icelandic artist 'Jón Stefánsson.' After a short introduction given to all participants, those in the eccentricity condition read that "On the personal level, Jón Stefánsson is often described as very eccentric", whereas those in the control condition were not given this piece of information. Next, participants viewed three pictures of 'modern artworks', entitled *The Dragon* (Figure 1a), *Labyrinths* (Figure 1b), and *Through the Bushes* (Figure 1c), all of which were fictitious art. Participants evaluated the artworks on two items (e.g., "I like this artwork"; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*), and indicated how much they would be willing to spend for each of the artworks (in Euro).

Results and Discussion

The reliability of the art evaluation items of the artworks were high for each artwork (α = .92, α = .93, α = .95, respectively) as well as for the items taken together (α = .87). We computed participants' average scores on the six items accordingly. Averaged evaluations of the three artworks were entered into a one-way ANOVA with the eccentricity manipulation as independent variable. As predicted, the art was evaluated more positively when participants were primed with the artist's eccentric personality (*M* = 3.59, *SD* = 1.38) than in the control condition (*M* = 2.34, *SD* = 1.27), $F(1, 31) = 7.25$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .19$.

Next, we examined the monetary values assigned to the artworks. People typically weigh the monetary value nonlinearly (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), and a high skew was consistently present in assigned monetary values (skewness equaled 2.26, 2.07, and 2.87, respectively, *SE* = 0.41). We hence square-root transformed these values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2000) after which skewness reached reasonable levels (skewness equaled 1.202, 0.93, and 1.29, respectively, *SE* = 0.41). Next, we averaged these square-root transformed monetary values ($\alpha = .83$), which correlated positively with the art evaluations analyzed above ($r = .58$, $p < .001$) and we entered the monetary value composite as dependent variable into a similar one-way ANOVA as before. This analysis revealed the predicted eccentricity effect ($M = 7.59$, $SD = 5.11$ vs. $M = 4.03$, $SD = 3.69$), $F(1, 31) = 5.07$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .14$. In sum, these results confirm that the mere eccentricity of the artist positively contributed to the evaluation and perceived monetary value of the art.

Study 3: Jón Stefánsson's Distinctive Appearance

In Study 1 and 2, we examined the impact of artist eccentricity on art evaluation by varying the *presence* of information on eccentricity. A drawback of this method is that the control condition not only differed in eccentricity, but also in the quantity of information that was presented. To rule out the possibility that differences in the amount of information contributed to the observed effects, we presented participants in Study 3 with the same amount of information (a photograph of the artist) and varied the *content* of this cue (level of eccentricity). Thus, in Study 3 we tested the eccentricity effect by manipulating the eccentric look of a fictitious artist. Further, we tested whether *perceived* eccentricity mediates the effects of the eccentric looking artist on art evaluations.

Eccentricity appears to entail a particular form of deviance. Specifically, eccentricity seems to be attributable to subjects' appearance and behaviors—or more generally their expressions—which facilitates eccentricity inferences. Although such individuals may also be

considered deviant, this latter concept is far broader and need not involve expression. For example, a deviant symbol within an array can be considered deviant (Förster et al., 2005), but could hardly be said to be 'eccentric'. To examine this specificity of eccentricity in particular rather than deviance as a more general concept, we included as mediators both eccentricity and the extent to which the artist appeared to look ordinary.

Method

Forty-four students (10 men, 34 women; M_{age} = 18.45, *SD* = 0.95) from a Western European university participated in exchange for course credit. They were randomly assigned to the high or low eccentricity condition. After providing informed consent, participants were worked on a computer study. They were informed that they would view several modern paintings by the alleged artist 'Jón Stefánsson' from Iceland.

We manipulated eccentricity using photographs of the artists that accompanied the artist's name. In the *low eccentricity condition*, the photograph depicted a man in his late twenties with an ordinary posture, short hair, and wearing a regular white blouse; in the *high eccentricity condition*, the photograph depicted a man in his late twenties who was skinny, had half-long hair combed over one side of his head, had not shaved for several days, and was wearing a black shirt and vest. Both photographs were presented in grey scale, presented the men's heads and torsos, and were matched in size and positioning on the screen. A pilot study confirmed that these two men differed in eccentricity but not on a wide range of additional characteristics (e.g., making a positive impression). Participants rated modern art pieces using the same materials and rating of modern art as in Study 2. In addition, participants indicated on separate items (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) how eccentric and ordinary the artist looked.

Results and Discussion

A one-way ANOVA with the perceived eccentricity as dependent variable and the eccentricity manipulation as independent variable confirmed that the perceived eccentricity was higher when the artist looked eccentric (M = 4.57, SD = 1.21) than when the artist looked ordinary (M = 3.09, SD = 1.59), $F(1, 42) = 11.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$. Not surprisingly, the eccentric artist was also considered to look less ordinary (M = 3.81, SD = 1.17) than the non-eccentric artist (M = 4.57, SD = 1.21), $F(1, 42) = 4.52$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .10$, and these two measures were negatively correlated (r = -.38, p = .01).

The reliability of the art evaluation items for each artwork were high ($\alpha = .88$, $\alpha = .81$, $\alpha = .93$, respectively), as was the case for the nine items taken together ($\alpha = .87$). We computed participants' average scores on the nine items accordingly. A one-way ANOVA with the aggregated evaluations of the three artworks as dependent variable confirmed that the art was evaluated more favorably in the high eccentricity (M = 3.65, SD = 0.79) than in the low eccentricity condition (M = 2.95, SD = 1.00), $F(1, 42) = 6.50$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .13$. In addition, the evaluations correlated positively with perceived eccentricity (r = .58, $p < .001$), and negatively with the extent to which the artist looked ordinary (r = -.38, p = .01).

We argue that *perceived eccentricity* of the artist explains the eccentricity effect. To test this hypothesis, we estimated a multiple mediation model (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) and included perceived eccentricity and looking ordinary as statistical mediators, with the eccentricity manipulation as dummy coded independent variable (0 = *low*; 1 = *high*). As reflected in Figure 2, this analysis revealed a significant total effect of the eccentricity manipulation on art evaluations, B = 0.70, SE = 0.27, p = .01, and paths to perceived eccentricity, B = 1.48, SE = 0.43, $p < .001$, and looking ordinary, B = -0.89, SE = 0.42, p = .04. Only looking eccentric subsequently predicted art evaluations, B = 0.32, SE = 0.09, $p <$ .001, whereas the path of looking ordinary was not reliable (p = .80). The non-mediated

effect of the artist manipulation on art evaluations was no longer significant (p = .39) and bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap estimates (1,000 bootstraps) confirmed the existence of a significant mediated effect through perceived eccentricity, 95% *CI* = [0.2054, 0.9564], but not through 'looking ordinary', 95% *CI* = [-0.2035, 0.1662]. These results indicate that art appreciations increase as a function of artists' eccentricity.

Study 4: The Weighty Behavior of Del Verrocchio and Beuys

Thus far we established the *existence* of a reliable eccentricity effect by focusing on several indicators of eccentricity: behavior, personality and appearance of artists. Next, we tested the psychological processes that underlie this effect and its boundary conditions. Further, this study was designed to rule out alternative explanations of the eccentricity effect. Can the eccentricity effect be expected to impact art evaluations indiscriminately, or are there boundary conditions to this phenomenon? Indeed, we propose that not all art is affected equally. In the present study, we focused on whether art is *conventional* versus *unconventional* as one particular boundary to the effect, and predicted the eccentricity effect to be specific to unconventional art. Unconventionality is consistent with the stereotype of artists: they are eccentric and usually more creative than others (Martindale, 1989), whereas conventionality is not stereotypical for artists. If the art itself was conventional, then the artist's eccentricity, that is, unconventional behavior, would be inconsistent with the art that the artist was producing. This inconsistency between the person (eccentric and thus unconventional) and the art (conventional) runs against people's expectations and would therefore reduce the reliance on the stereotype to infer the artwork quality based on the eccentricity of the artist. Following this rationale, the eccentricity effect would be more pronounced when the artwork was unconventional than when it was conventional. Consistently, prior research (e.g., Schimmel & Förster, 2008) established art conventionalism and conventionalism as a key moderator in art evaluations.

It is important to note that if the eccentricity effect has this boundary condition, the effect itself can hardly be attributed to factors such as people's mindsets, regulatory focus, approach-avoidance motivation, or construal level when being confronted with eccentricity of an artist, thus ruling out alternative explanations that are in part related to research on creativity and unconventionality (e.g., Friedman & Förster, 2000; 2002; 2005, Schimmel & Förster, 2008). Accordingly, we tested the impact of eccentricity on art evaluations by varying the nature of art: unconventional versus conventional. We predicted that the eccentricity effect would be more pronounced for unconventional than for conventional art.

Method

Sixty-four students (28 men, 36 women; M_{age} = 19.98, *SD* = 3.88) from a Western European university participated in exchange for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of a 2 (artist: eccentric vs. control) x 2 (art type: conventional vs. unconventional) x 2 (art order: conventional first vs. unconventional first) mixed factorial design. The eccentricity of the artist and the art type were varied within participants, and order of art was varied between participants.

Participants first gave informed consent and reported demographic information. Depending on order, participants were then requested to evaluate conventional art ('Lady of Flowers' by Andrea del Verrocchio) and unconventional artwork ('The Pack' by Joseph Beuys; Schimmel & Förster, 2008). Prior to looking at a photograph of the artwork, participants were provided with the name of the artist and a brief description. For the non-eccentric artist it was merely added that the rather unknown artist was a respected contributor to art. For the eccentric artist, it was further stated that he had carried roadside stones on his head to the construction site of his cottage, and that he continued doing this for the rest of his life. This example was taken from an online article on 'incredibly eccentric people' (http://listverse.com/2009/03/15/10-incredibly-eccentric-people/, 2012).

Subsequent to the brief description, participants were instructed to view the artwork depicted on the next page and evaluated it on three items (e.g., "I like this artwork"; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Next, participants indicated whether they considered the artist to be eccentric and ordinary (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) as in Study 3. After completing these evaluations for the first artist, participants did the same for the second artist. Importantly, every single participant was thus exposed to the eccentricity prime, either associated with the first or the second artist.

Results

Artist evaluations. A mixed linear model with the eccentricity manipulation, the art form, and order as independent factors and with a random effect of participant revealed a main effect of the eccentricity manipulation on perceived eccentricity, $F(1, 60) = 13.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.18$, as well as a main effect of art form, $F(1, 60) = 22.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.27$. As predicted, greater eccentricity was attributed to an artist when presented as eccentric ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.54$) than when not presented as eccentric ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.77$). Participants also attributed greater eccentricity to the creator of the unconventional art ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.62$) relative that of the conventional art ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.62$). This latter finding likely reflects that eccentricity is indeed more typically associated with artists who create unconventional art compared to creators of conventional work. No further main effects or interaction emerged (Fs < 1).

A similar analysis as the above indicated that the perceived level of the unconventional artist being ordinary also differed between the eccentricity ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.58$) and control condition ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.82$), $F(1, 60) = 7.02$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.11$. None of the other main and interaction effects were reliable (Fs < 1). The perceived level of 'looking ordinary' correlated negatively with perceived eccentricity for the unconventional artist ($r = -.43$, $p < .001$), but not for the conventional artist ($r = -.14$, $p = .26$).

Art evaluations. A mixed linear model similar to those previous with the averaged art evaluations ($\alpha_1 = 0.94$, $\alpha_2 = 0.96$) as dependent variables yielded a reliable main effect of art form, $F(1, 60) = 51.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.46$, indicating that the unconventional art ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.44$) was generally less appreciated than the conventional art ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.58$). Importantly, a significant interaction between art form and eccentricity emerged, $F(1, 60) = 5.42$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .08$, reflecting that the eccentricity cue increased the evaluations of the unconventional art ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.57$ vs. $M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.19$), $F(1, 62) = 4.61$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .07$, but did not reliably affect liking of the conventional art, ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.79$ vs. $M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.30$), $F(1, 62) = 2.22$, $p = .14$, $\eta^2 = .04$. None of the other main and interaction effects, including those of order, yielded reliable effects (all *p*s > .12). Moreover, the evaluations of the unconventional art were significantly positively related to the perceived eccentricity of this artist ($r = .25$, $p = .04$). Conversely, the unconventional art evaluations shared no significant association with perceived eccentricity of the artist ($r = -.05$, $p = .72$). Moreover, these unconventional art evaluations did not yield a significant correlation with looking ordinary ($r = .06$, $p = .65$) as was the case for the conventional art ($r = .12$, $p = .35$).

Mediation model. After confirming the existence of the eccentricity effect for *unconventional* art in particular, we proceeded with testing whether the enhanced evaluation of unconventional art was mediated by perceived eccentricity. To this end, we estimated a multiple mediation model (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), which included 'looking ordinary' as alternative mediator (Figure 3).[3] This analysis revealed a significant total effect of the eccentricity manipulation on art evaluations, $B = 0.75$, $SE = 0.35$, $p = .04$, and paths to

[3] Please note that a test of moderated mediation (e.g., Hayes, 2012, Model 15) conceptualizes moderating variables as between-participants variables. Given that in our study it was a within-participant variable, such an analysis would not be appropriate. Further details can be requested from the authors.

perceived eccentricity, $B = 0.88$, $SE = 0.39$, $p = .03$, and looking ordinary, $B = -0.84$, $SE = 0.41$, $p = .04$. Perceived eccentricity subsequently predicted art evaluations, $B = 0.26$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = .03$, whereas the path of the extent to which the artist looked ordinary was marginal, $B = 0.21$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = .07$. The non-mediated effect of the artist manipulation on art evolutions was less pronounced than its total effect, $B = 0.70$, $SE = 0.36$, $p = .05$, and bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap estimates (1,000 bootstraps) confirmed the existence of a significant mediated effect through perceived eccentricity, *95% CI* = [0.0219, 0.5884], and also through 'normality', *95% CI* = [-0.5577, -0.0002]. A similar analysis for conventional art did not support mediation of perceived eccentricity or looking ordinary, *95% CI* = [-0.2859, 0.3433], *95% CI* = [-0.4212, 0.0416], respectively.

Discussion

In the current study we tested the underlying processes of the eccentricity effect and a theoretically important boundary condition. As in the previous studies, eccentricity led to more positive evaluations of art. This effect was particular, however, to unconventional as opposed to conventional art. Eccentricity is stereotypically associated with unconventional and high quality art. If, however, the artwork is conventional, then the relationship between artist and the artwork is inconsistent, which leads people to refrain from inferences about the quality of the art based on the eccentricity of the artist.

Further, the study contained a within-subjects manipulation of eccentricity of the artists. Both the qualification of the eccentricity effect by the type of artwork and the procedure itself rule out the potential alternative explanations of induced general mindsets or construal levels (e.g., see Friedman & Förster, 2000; 2002; 2005; Schimmel & Förster, 2008).

Study 5: Lady Gaga's Tight Black Outfit

We argue that eccentricity, at least when associated with unconventional art, is used to infer that the artist is genuine and skilled given the stereotypical belief that artists are

eccentric. To test this inference process, we measured and manipulated it in Study 5. Specifically, we measured *perceived artistic skill* as inference mediating the effect of eccentricity on art evaluations. In addition, we looked at another boundary condition of the eccentricity effect: diagnosticity of the eccentricity cue. If eccentricity cues are used by people to make inferences about the skill of the artist and the artist's work, then dismissing the eccentricity cue as being *non-diagnostic*—for example because the eccentricity is deemed inauthentic—should reduce the eccentricity effect. Put differently, when a cue that suggest eccentricity, such as deviant behavior or appearance, is discarded as false information, the impact of the eccentricity cue is expected to seize accordingly. We tested the importance of the congruence between the eccentricity and artists' authenticity by examining music evaluations of a contemporary artist, *Lady Gaga*.

In a review of Lady Gaga's role in popular culture, the sociologist Corona (2011) noted that Lady Gaga was "followed by over seven million people on Twitter and was 2010's second most 'googled' celebrity in the U.S." (p. 725). Moreover, Corona describes Lady Gaga's reputation as "closely tied to an endless stream of avant-garde fashion worn in her music videos, performances, and public appearances." (p. 725). Concrete examples of arguably eccentric appearances have been documented by the *Daily Mail* of 11 November 2009, for example, who report that in one music video "The eccentric singer is seen lying in bed with a skeleton and dancing in a bath and cavorting around in little more than a thong in a series of breathtaking scenes." On 13 September 2013, *The Guardian* reported Lady Gaga to have received an award "in hat, dress and boots apparently made of various cuts of raw meat." We decided that Lady Gaga would serve as an excellent example artist in our examination of perceived eccentricity and evaluations of creativity.

Method

Seventy-eight students (35 men, 43 women; M_{age} = 22.23, *SD* = 6.88) from a Western European university participated in exchange for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (eccentricity: low vs. high) x 2 (image diagnosticity: low vs. control) between-participants design.

After providing informed consent, participants were given a questionnaire that displayed a photograph of Lady Gaga. Based on a pilot study we selected two photographs of the artist, one suggesting more eccentricity than the other. In the *high eccentricity condition*, this photograph depicted her in a crouched position, wearing a tight black suit, black boots, black gloves, and a large, shiny mask; the photograph in the *low eccentricity condition* depicted her with a more ordinary black dress while seated on a chair, with regular make-up, and with black hair in a ponytail. Both photographs were presented in grey scale and were matched in size and positioning. The name 'Lady Gaga' was printed below each photograph.

Participants in the *low diagnosticity condition* were suggested that the appearance was of low authenticity. Specifically, participants read that "Some music critics say that the appearance and image of Lady Gaga is one of the most heavily marketed and strategically thought-through in contemporary pop-music". This comment was not included in the *control condition*. Prior to completing any other questions, participants indicated if they had heard of Lady Gaga before (*yes* or *no*). Preliminary analysis revealed that all participants were familiar with Lady Gaga.

Three questions were included to assess the inferred artistic skill of Lady Gaga (e.g., "I think that Lady Gaga is a highly skilled artist"; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Participants indicated their appreciation of Lady Gaga's music on three items (e.g., "How much do you appreciate Lady Gaga's music?"; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Thus, different from previous studies in which we presented the art to participants, we here relied on participants' familiarity with the artist's work. Next, participants indicated the extent to which they considered Lady Gaga to look eccentric in the photograph (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Results and Discussion

A two-way ANOVA with the eccentricity manipulation and image authenticity as independent variables revealed the expected main effect of the eccentricity manipulation on perceived eccentricity, $F(1, 74) = 218.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .75$. Thus, participants considered Lady Gaga to *look* more eccentric in the high eccentricity condition ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 1.28$) than in the low eccentricity condition ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.16$). Neither a significant main effect of Lady Gaga's image authenticity nor a reliable interaction effect was observed (all Fs < 1).

Next, we entered the averaged artistic skill items ($\alpha = .91$) as dependent variable into an ANOVA with the same independent variables. As reflected in Figure 4a, this analysis revealed a significant main effect of the eccentricity manipulation, $F(1, 74) = 5.49$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .07$, a non-significant main effect of image authenticity ($F < 1$), and the crucial significant

interaction effect, $F(1, 74) = 8.75$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .11$. Specifically, when the artist's authenticity was not discredited then the high eccentricity condition resulted in higher perceived artistic skills ($M = 5.79$, $SD = 0.83$) relative to the low eccentricity condition ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.58$), $t(74) = 3.70$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.86$. However, when the artist's authenticity was called into question, there was no difference between high eccentricity ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.23$) and low eccentricity ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.48$; $t < 1$). Complementary, a significant positive correlation existed between perceived skill and eccentricity when authenticity was not called into question ($r = .50$, $p < .001$), whereas the association between eccentric looks and perceived skill was not significant in the inauthentic condition ($r = -.10$, $p = .53$).

Next, we entered the averaged art evaluation items ($\alpha = .91$) as dependent variable into a similar two-way ANOVA. As reflected in Figure 4b, this analysis revealed no significant main effect of the eccentricity manipulation, $F(1, 74) = 1.64$, $p = .21$, $\eta^2 = .02$, a non-significant main effect of image authenticity, $F(1, 74) = 1.08$, $p = .30$, $\eta^2 = .01$, and the crucial significant interaction effect, $F(1, 74) = 4.70$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .06$. When the artists authenticity was not called into question, we observed that high eccentricity led to higher evaluation of the artwork than low eccentricity of the artist ($M = 5.58$, $SD = 1.02$ vs. $M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.25$), $t(74) = 2.41$, $p = .02$, $d = 0.56$. However, this eccentricity effect did not emerge when the authenticity of the artists was discredited ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.52$ vs. $M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.44$; $t < 1$).

We argue that the eccentricity effect on artwork is based on people's inference that the eccentric artist is a 'creative genius' (e.g., Martindale, 1989). That is, the eccentricity effect on artwork is mediated by the eccentricity effect on perceived skills. Indeed, perceived skill significantly related to art evaluations ($r = .77$, $p < .001$). However, we argue that this mediation occurs only when the eccentricity is perceived as diagnostic (e.g., when authentic), but less so when it is undiagnostic (e.g., when unauthentic and thus discredited). Consistent

with this proposition, the extent to which participants considered Lady Gaga to *look* eccentric only significantly correlated with art evaluations when authenticity was not called into question (r = .48, p < .01), whereas no such association emerged in the inauthentic condition (r = -.05, p = .75). This predicted 'conditional mediation' was further statistically examined using the 'ModMed' procedure by Preacher and colleagues (2007, Model 2).

As reflected in Figure 5, the effect coded eccentricity manipulation (-1 = *low*, 1 = *high*), the effect of our authenticity manipulation (-1 = *control*, 1 = *low*), and their interaction were specified as predictors of both perceived artistic skill (conditional mediator) and the art evaluations (dependent variable). In addition, the artist's perceived artistic skill was specified as predictor of the art evaluations. The analysis indicated a direct effect of the eccentricity manipulation on perceived artistic skill, B = 0.35, SE = 0.15, p = 0.02, and the critical direct effect of the interaction variable, B = -0.44, SE = 0.15, p < 0.01, indicating that the artist's skill was particularly higher in the high versus low eccentricity condition, when the eccentricity was not called into question. The partial effect of image authenticity did not reliably affect perceived artistic skill, B = -0.12, SE = 0.15, p = 0.42.

With respect to the art evaluations, perceived artistic skill—the conditional mediator—significantly predicted subsequent art evaluations, B = 0.75, SE = 0.08, p < 0.001, whereas none of the other predictors were significant (all ps > .51). A test of conditional mediation employing 1,000 bootstraps confirmed the existence of a significant mediated effect when the artist's authenticity was not discredited, B = 0.59, SE = 0.18, p < .01, whereas no reliable mediation existed when the artist's authenticity was discredited, B = -0.07, SE = 0.16, p = .67. As predicted, these results confirm that the eccentricity effect on evaluations of the artwork was fully mediated by perceived artistic skill, but only when the authenticity of displayed eccentricity was not called into question.

General Discussion

People stereotypically believe that artists are eccentric (Martindale, 1989). We tested the hypothesis that higher eccentricity of an artist increases the appreciation for the artwork, tested the perceived skills of the artist as critical mediating inference, and examined the domain of art (conventional versus unconventional) as well as authenticity of the eccentricity as boundary conditions. Highlighting Van Gogh's eccentric *behavior* of cutting his own ear lobe increased the appreciation for his art (Study 1), as did highlighting the eccentric *personality* of a fictitious artist (Study 2). To rule out that the eccentricity effect was affected by the asymmetry in information present in the conditions of Study 1 and 2, we subsequently manipulated eccentricity by modifying the *level* of eccentricity using an alleged photograph of the artist. Indeed, art made by a relatively eccentric versus less eccentric *looking* fictitious artist was more appreciated, and this effect was fully mediated by the perceived eccentricity of the artist (Study 3). The eccentricity effect was found to be artist specific (Study 4), suggesting that it stems from inferences rooted in the stereotype about artists rather than resulting from priming general cognitive mindsets or construal levels. Moreover, studies 3 and 4 indicate that deviation in general, rather than eccentricity in particular, unlikely explains the eccentricity effect given that the mediation through perceived eccentricity remained after controlling for the extent to which the artist generally looked ordinary or not. The results are consistent with our proposed stereotype-confirmation process. Moreover, eccentricity of the artist affected evaluations of unconventional but not conventional art, confirming our hypothesis that eccentricity is used for inferences about the quality of unconventional art. Conventional art, however, is less associated with less of a deviation from expectations, and therefore eccentricity of artists is a non-diagnostic cue for inferences about the quality of this type of art.

Finally, the music made by the popular contemporary artist Lady Gaga was more appreciated after people had viewed a relatively eccentric versus less eccentric photograph of her, and this effect was fully mediated by the extent to which people perceived Lady Gaga to be a skilled artist. Importantly, the eccentricity effect on Lady Gaga's perceived artistic skill and the appreciation for her art was not observed after suggesting that Lady Gaga's image was based on an elaborate marketing strategy. This boundary condition for the eccentricity effect illuminates how important beliefs of authenticity are when making attributions and inferences based on an artist's eccentric appearance. That is, eccentricity is only diagnostic of an artist's skills and the artwork if the eccentricity is authentic. Moreover, these results were obtained in a context where we did not expose participants to the artist's work given participants' familiarity with Lady Gaga's work, suggesting that the eccentricity effect can arise even when applied to an artist's oeuvre rather than a single artwork. Taken together, these results confirmed our hypothesis that artist eccentricity increases people's appreciation for the artistic creations.[4]

In conceptualizing our theoretical frame, we were inspired by existing research from a variety of areas, including creativity in social identity context (e.g., Adarves-Yorno et al., 2006), stereotyping research (e.g., Phelan & Rudman, 2010), and studies on deviance priming (e.g., Förster et al., 2005). Importantly, our findings are consistent with stereotype

[4] In an additional study we tested whether primed eccentricity (using eccentric vs. non-eccentric pictures) of three eccentric artists (Lady Gaga, Salvador Dali, & Björk) affected the evaluation of various conventional and unconventional works (see Schimmel & Förster, 2008). Note also that the artists were not the creators of the art. Importantly, the eccentricity prime did not reliably affect art evaluations. These findings may suggest that the eccentricity effect is not rooted in an associative link between eccentricity and creativity, in differences in construal levels, or regulatory foci. Details of the study can be provided upon request.

confirmation processes in particular (e.g., Snyder & Swann, 1978) yet we compliment research in this domain in various ways, by empirically examining the common but understudied phenomenon of eccentricity, identifying a novel mediating variable, and showing important boundary conditions that had not been examined before.

Novelty and Contribution

The present findings are important as they show that an attribute that seems irrelevant to the quality of the artwork—eccentricity of the creator—nevertheless impacts on artwork impressions. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first detailed empirical research that establishes a link from creator eccentricity to appreciation of creative works, and these findings have important implications for the psychology of trait inferences, creative processes, and authenticity. Moreover, we extend prior research into stereotype confirmation in artistic performance (Phelan & Rudman, 2010) by presenting multiple studies replicating the effect in slightly different contexts (e.g., eccentricity of behavior, personality, or appearance), illuminating the mediating role of artistic skill attributions, and identifying two important boundary conditions (art domain and authenticity of eccentric cues).

Eccentricity represents a sense of individualism: A core feature of 'being eccentric' is a difference to normality. Our research gives insights into the psychological process that underlies a confirmation between exemplar and stereotype. Specifically, the results of our mediation analyses show that the confirmation of stereotypes affects evaluations via the attribution of skills. Finally, our research identified perceived authenticity as a crucial moderator variable. The identification of this moderator shows the importance of implicit personality theories and the social context for the emergence of the stereotype-based effect. Hence, the use of the stereotype appears subjected to considerations of the diagnosticity of the stereotypical cue.

We demonstrate that a deviation (eccentricity of an artist) from 'normal' behavior or trait consistent with a stereotype of the subgroup (artists) triggers inferences about the ability of the exemplar and the quality of his or her work. Further, the inferences are moderated by the diagnosticity of the cue (authenticity of eccentricity) for such inferences. Moreover, our research shows that a relatively peripheral cue (eccentricity) is important to people's inferences simply because the cue is a defining element of the stereotype (about artists). Overall, our research builds on the notion of person perception research (for an overview see Fiske & Taylor, 2013). We have considered a number of (moderator and mediator) variables to best demonstrate the dynamic inferential processes relating to eccentricity as cue and artists and their work (as targets). By no means do we argue that the evaluation of artists is only based on eccentricity, or that eccentricity is unrelated to other social groups. The inferential process is determined by the degree to which the behavioral cue or trait (e.g., eccentricity) confirms the stereotype (e.g., artists, stock brokers, gravediggers).

The finding that the perceptions of others' eccentricity mold evaluations of creative endeavors illuminates the importance of the social context in its evaluation. This is an intriguing finding given that one might intuitively consider the creativity of work to be primarily rooted in the intrinsic characteristics of the art itself. Our observation is consistent with research into the impact that social identification processes have on perceptions of creativity. For example, Adarves-Yorno and colleagues (2006) found that criteria used to assess creativity were strongly embedded in the norms set by the ingroup. Specifically, these researchers found that whether a specific proposed strategy (e.g., conservative or progressive) was deemed creative critically depended on whether this approach was consistent with ingroup norms, with ideas that reflected the norm being judged as more creative. In extension of these findings, works created by members of the ingroup are considered to be more creative in comparison to the same products produced by outgroup members (Adarves-Yorno

et al., 2008), and people's own creative works tend to conform to the prevailing standards within the ingroup (Adarves-Yorno, Postmes, & Haslam, 2007). The findings by Adarves-Yorno and colleagues, as well as the present finding that creativity perceptions are part rooted in confirmation of artist stereotypes, present a rather ironic picture of creativity: The perception of creative endeavors, typically considered as (usefully) original, deviant, and novel, are deeply embedded in conformist processes. In the broader sense, our research links in with the study of creativity and deviance priming (Förster et al., 2005) and subscribes to the situational malleability of aesthetic impressions as noted by Schimmel and Förster (2008). Whereas these past examinations have either looked at deviance in the context of people's *own* creativity or at art impressions outside of the context of deviance, we complement these approaches by examining the effect of eccentricity on perceptions of art. Moreover, our research is consistent with the notion that feature overlap between an exemplar (artist) and stereotypical expectations (about artists) affect judgments (e.g., Phalen & Rudman, 2010). In our case, a high feature overlap between the artist (eccentric) and the stereotype about artists (eccentricity) increases the evaluation of the artist's skills and the quality of the artwork.

Conclusion

In everyday life people are often confronted with judgments about art. We found that these judgments depend on the displayed eccentricity of the artist as along as the art is unconventional and the displayed eccentricity seems authentic. This research thus shows that the results of creative endeavors are clearly not solely determined by the quality of the creative outcomes, but also depend crucially on the perceived degree of eccentricity of the artist—a characteristic that is peripheral to the artwork but nonetheless impactful for its evaluation.

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Figure 1a: The First Presented Artwork—Titled ‘The Dragon’

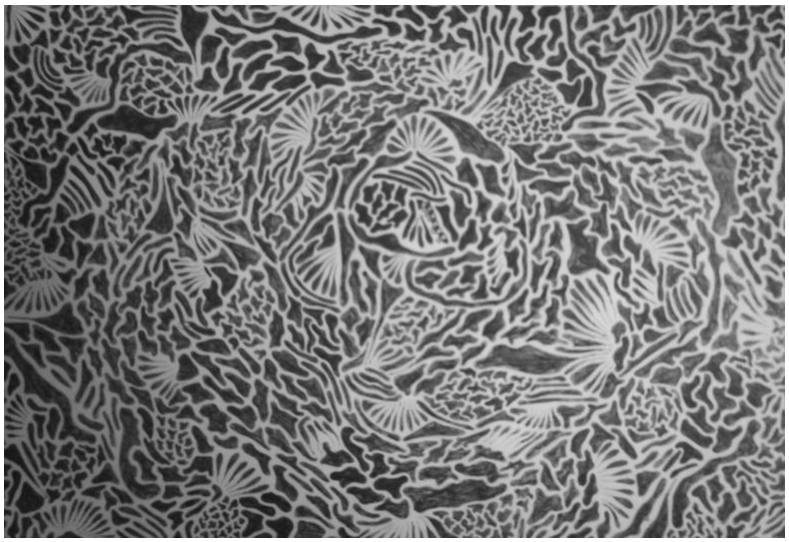


Figure 1b: The Second Presented Artwork—Titled ‘Labyrinths’

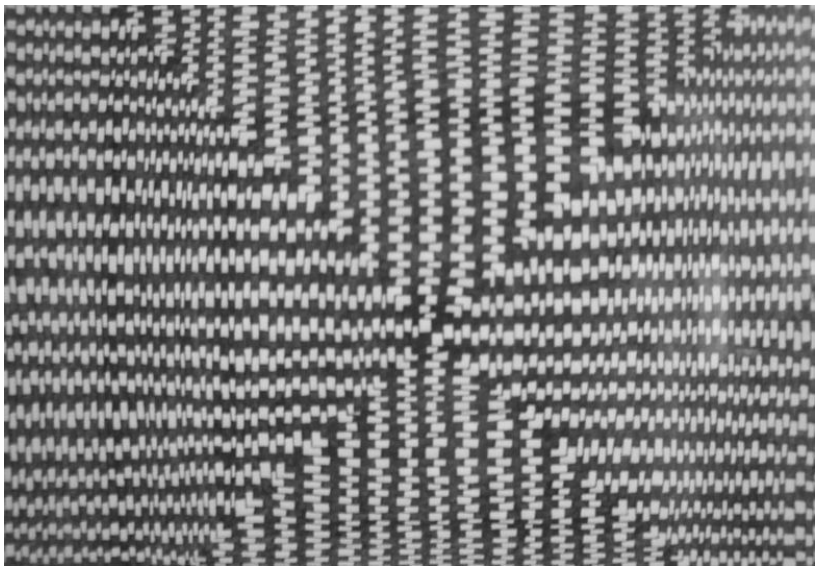


Figure 1c: The Third Presented Artwork—Titled ‘Through the Bushes’

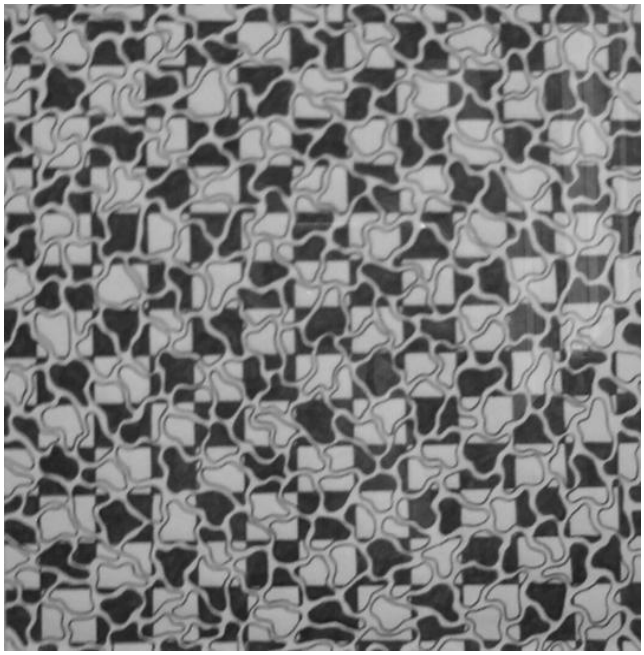
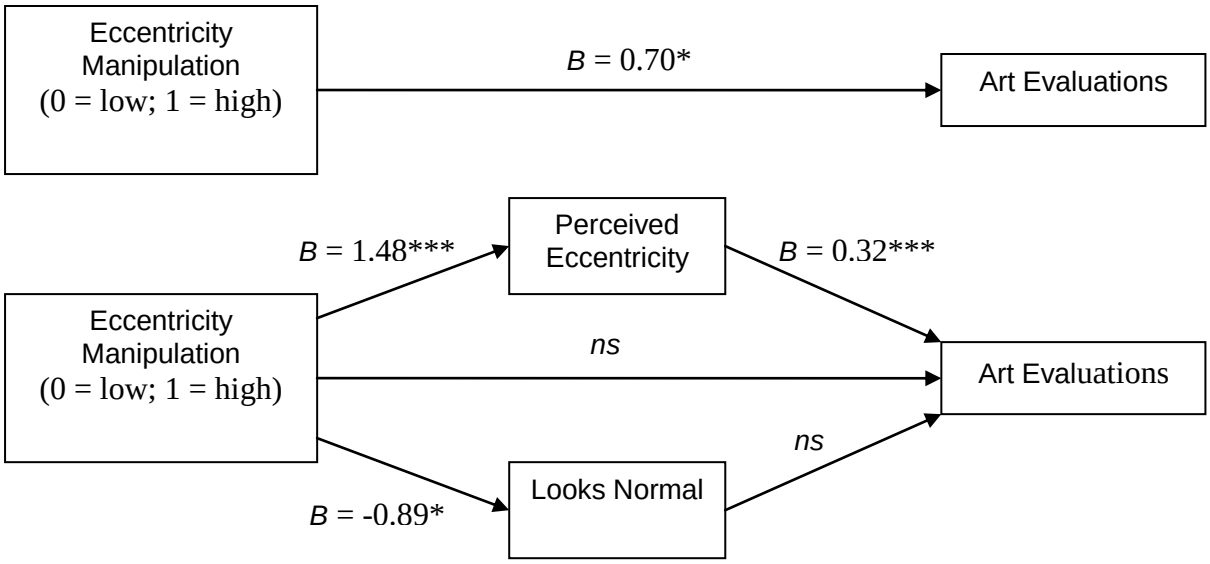
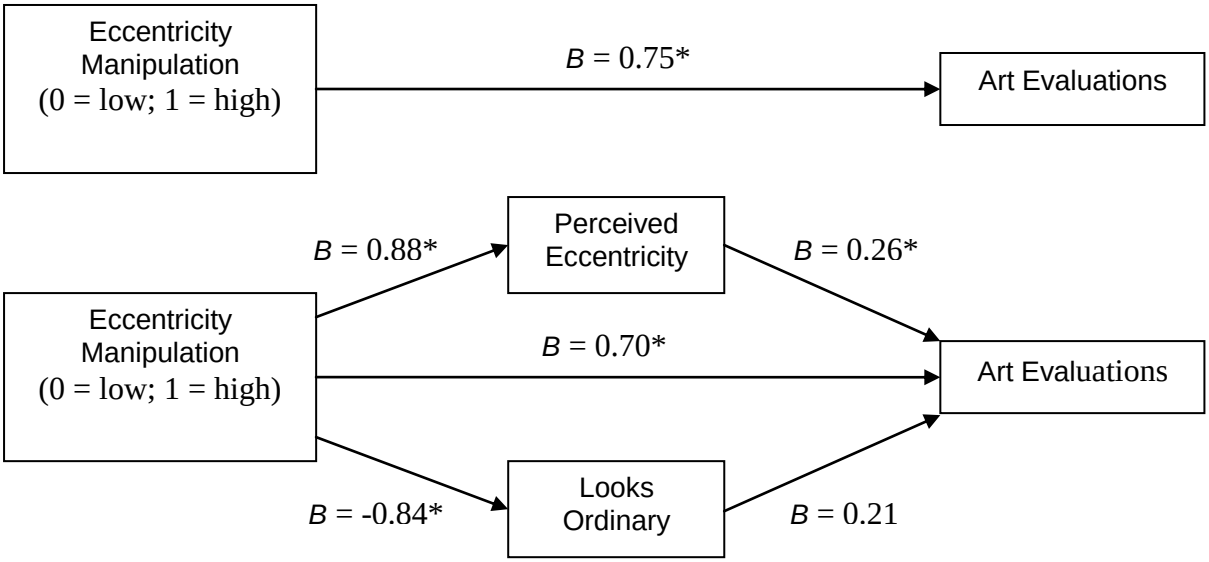


Figure 2: Multiple Mediation Model on Eccentricity and Art Evaluations (Study 3).



Note: Results for the multiple mediation model (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) on eccentricity and art evaluations based on Study 3. *ns* $p > .10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Indirect path through perceived eccentricity and looking normal were, 95% *CI* = [0.2056, 0.9564] and 95% *CI* = [-2035, 0.1662], respectively.

Figure 3: Multiple Mediation Model on Eccentricity and Unconventional Art (Study 4).



Note: Results for the multiple mediation model (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) on eccentricity and art evaluations based on Study 4. *ns* $p > .10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Indirect path through perceived eccentricity and looking normal were, 95% *CI* = [0.0219, 0.5884] and 95% *CI* = [-0.5577, -0.0002], respectively.

Figure 4a: Lady Gaga's Perceived Artistic Skill (Study 5).

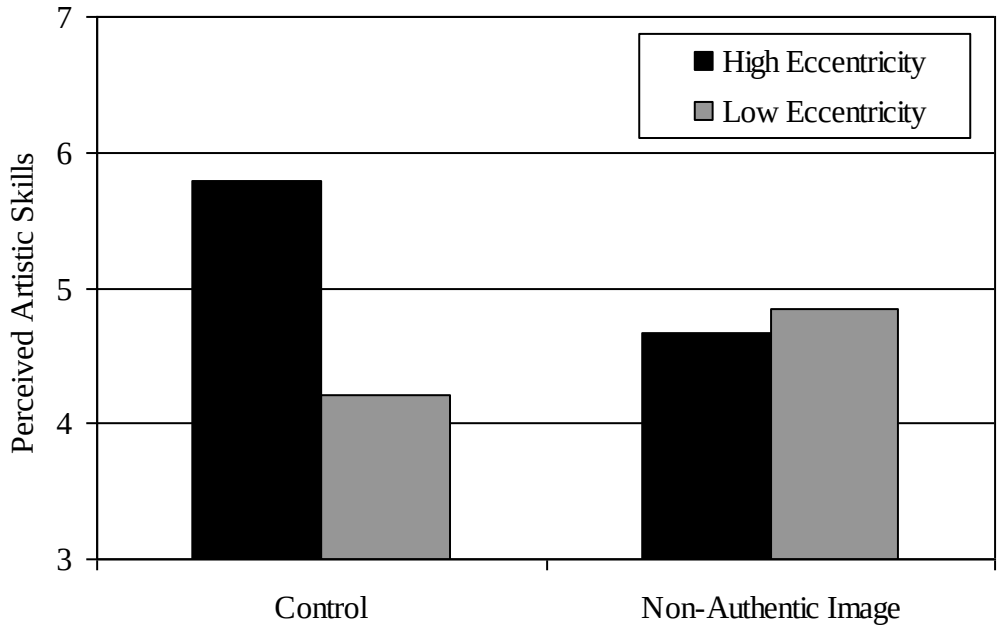


Figure 4b: Evaluations of Lady Gaga's Music (Study 5).

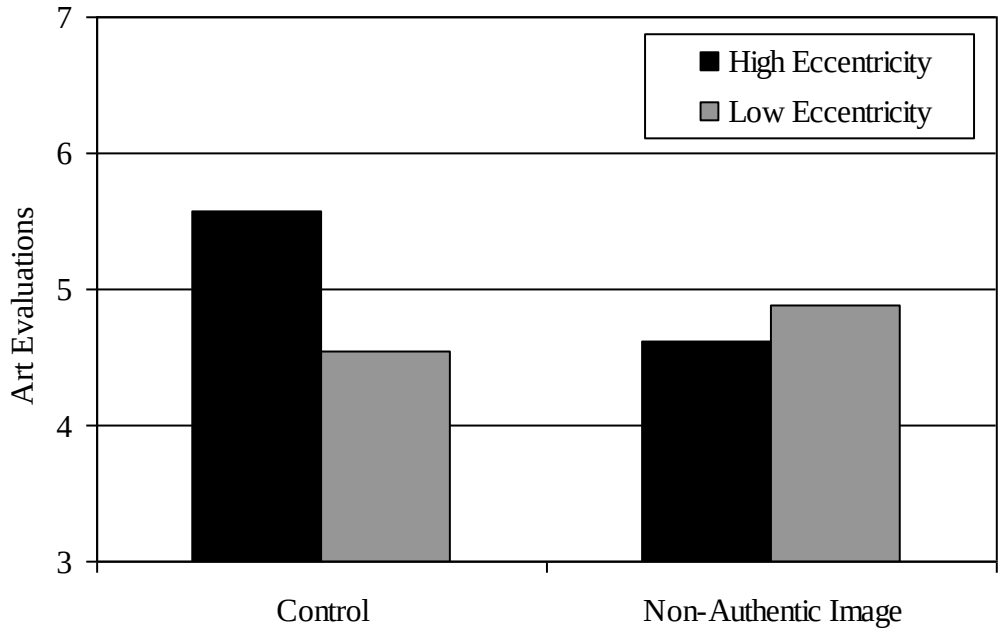
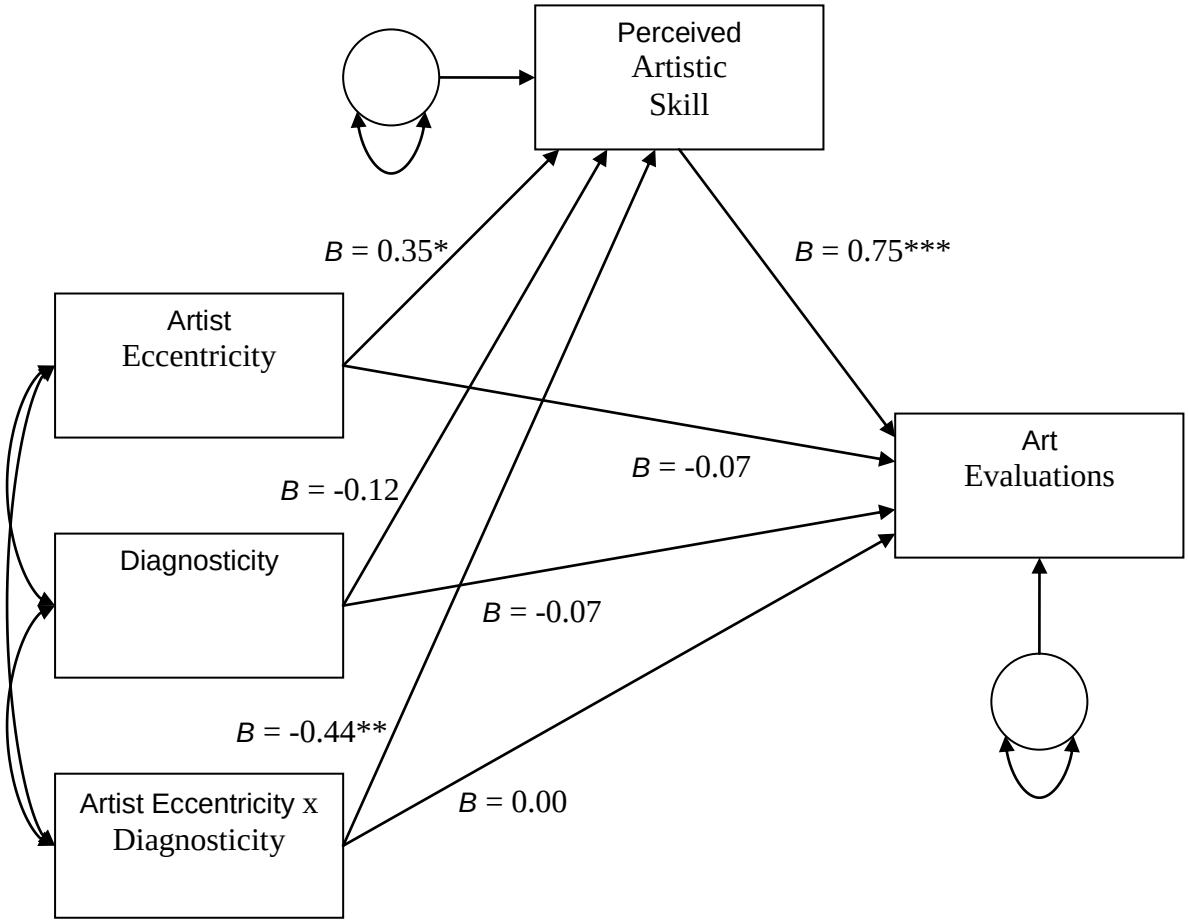


Figure 5: *Results for the Analysis of Conditional Mediation (Study 5)*



Note: The representation of this model was adopted based on Preacher and colleagues (2008). Conditional mediation for diagnostic control condition, $B = 0.59$, $S_e = 0.18$, $p < .001$; conditional mediation for undiagnostic condition, $B = -0.07$, $S_e = 0.16$, $p = .66$. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$